

Lloyd Johnson #33
December 8, 1984

Q: Mr. Johnson, I'd like to start at the beginning of your Navy career. When did you first join the Navy?

A: I enlisted in the Navy in Chicago, Illinois, on the 10th of February, 1928.

Q: What made you decide you wanted to join the Navy?

A: I started working on farms at about the age of 14. I worked about 4 years by the month. In other words, you called it "hiring out" and you agreed to work, but you worked 12 - 14 hours a day let us say from some time in April around the first of September. After about when I was 18...about 19, I revolted and I refused to work under those conditions. I worked one year "by the day", on an hourly basis. And then in the Fall of 1927, I went to work in the railroad shops of the Burlington Railroad at Iola(?), Illinois, which was a suburb of Aurora. I worked in that "hell hole" for the magnificent sum of \$.25 and hour until the following Spring, when they decided I wasn't doing enough work to justify my \$.25, and they put me on piecework. The net result was I had to quit my job and then try to get in the Navy in the winter time, rather than wait until Spring, because I knew the winters were cold in the Great Lakes.

Q: Where did you take your basic training?

A: Great Lakes.

Q: And how long did that last?

A: In those days, it lasted from some time in February to some time in April.

Q: Do you recall the first ship to which you were assigned?

A: Well, my next trip I went to the radio school that's at San Diego, where I spent something like 7 or 8 unsuccessful months trying to become a radioman. I had two things against me - one is I couldn't type fast enough and my reactions were so slow, that while I could read the codes (code sounds), I could not transmit them from my brain to my fingers fast enough to be accurate as a radio operator. Also, in the mean time, I had a bad ear. They punctured it; they took my tonsils out and I sat in radio school for months not being able to hear out of one ear and having reactions too slow to become a radio man. And years later when they finally kicked me out of radio school, it was the greatest favor they ever done me in my life.

Q: What did you do then?

A: This is interesting thing, I was in the outgoing unit of San Diego with a friend of mine, who had also failed in radio school, and they lined us up for draft. And the radio officer said, "Anybody who wants to go to the [USS] *Henderson*, China, go." Before anybody else could react, I stepped forward, and Robby my friend also, he stepped forward too, and we were the only two. They put us on a bus that night, transferred us from San Pedro to San Diego and the good ship *Henderson* started north. And at midnight, that night, I found myself up on deck as a lookout, looking for lights, but I never saw any.

Q: Where was the ship headed?

A: It was headed to the Navy Yard at Mare Island for an over haul. And for the next three years plus, I was engaged in making seven round trips to the Orient and back, as we carried passengers back and forth to the Asiatic Fleet. In the mean time in addition to the seven round trips to China, we also added it on when we made three trips from the West Coast all the way to Norfolk and back. The trip to the Orient, a round trip, took three months. When we made the trip to Norfolk and to the Orient and back, that took six months.

Q: When was the first time you got to Hawaii?

A: In very early.... probably about my birthday, about December 1928 on the way to the Orient.

Q: What was Shanghai like in those days?

A: Shanghai was the most amazing place, and let me explain. As we made our trips to the Orient, we would go from San Francisco, a day or so in Honolulu, a day or so in Guam (two weeks later), where the *Henderson* baseball team would play one of the Navy teams there, and I was on the baseball team. We then would go about six days to Manila, spend maybe three night in Manila, and of course we all went to Saza(???) Anna's Dance Hall and danced with the bellarinos(??)(*that's the Phillipino girls.*) And the most attractive ones are what we called the mestizos. They were the Phillipino girls who had a white father and some of them were strikingly beautiful. From Manila we would go to Hong Kong for one or two nights (beautiful place but not much there), then a day or so up to Shanghai, where we would disembark the Marines, making a trip up to North China, as far as Chinwantao. That's the railroad terminal for Peking. And on two occasions I was in Tsingtao, maybe one day and one night, and I've also been in Chefoo once. Then we went back to San Francisco, anchored in the Yangtze River, off the Bund...

Q: Was that in Shanghai?

A: In Shanghai. And then we would have recreation there (*leave and recreation*) about twelve days. And in my seven trips I have figured out that I have spent the equivalent of about 90 days in Shanghai. In those days we were allowed to go out into the

international concessions and we could also go out North Session(??) Road to Range Road. That was open to us. We could go out beyond Range Road, staying on North Session(??) Road where the Japanese cabarets were. The rest of the city was restricted to us, and I suppose by rickshaw and other ways, days and nights, I covered the cabaret scene, and I also had my camera riding rickshaws and taking pictures. The city was beautiful and fascinating, especially for a country boy who had never seen anything before. And it was basically safe. In fact the most dangerous things you could meet in Shanghai at that day, other than getting down in the French concession, Blood Alley, where the service people from the various services might get together and fight in cabarets, would be one of your ship mates who didn't like you and might punch you or hit you when you didn't know it. And the other thing is Cabarets, you learn fast, I never went in a Cabaret, I always went with a friend of mine named Roger McCluney and I always sat with my back to the wall. Some of the nice young boys were out there and the Asiatic Fleet thought they were tough and they had a very quaint system of being very brave which consisted of hitting somebody over the head with a beer bottle from behind. But nobody was going to face two boys who didn't get drunk.

Q: Do you remember how to spell McCluney's last name, just for the record?

A: Yes, the name was Roger McCluney, M-C-C-L-U-N-E-Y. The boy was from Tulsa, Oklahoma and his father was quite a well to do oil man, because it was such a contrast. I was sending half of my money home to my mother so my younger brothers could eat and his father used to send him maybe \$50 or \$75 bucks every once in a while. So he was a rich young kid and I was poor.

Q: It sounds like quite a supplement for a sailors salary!

A: Well, he was probably the only man on the ship who had a supplement.

Q: How fast was rank? How fast did a sailor advance in rank in those days?

A: Very, very slow. Let me illustrate. When I went aboard the *Henderson*, I of course, was a Seaman 2nd Class. You (word unclear) for under Seamen 3 or 4 months, \$21.00 a month, then \$36. Now I was in the deck force. I went to board the ship about late November, and the following May we had an examination for Seaman 1st Class and there was ten or twelve of us who went up for advancement. Only two of us were on our first cruise. The rest of them were people who had over 4 years in the Navy and were still Seamen 2nd Class. So by May I was Seaman 1st Class. Then that Fall by accident I got to be the messenger or the striker in the executive offices. And again I was very fortunate, I went into the office in August and I became a Yeoman 3rd class in December, 1929, less than two years.

Then the only way you could get promoted was to have a vacancy on the ship. I stayed on the *Henderson* two more years. We never had a vacancy. In '32 or so the Depression hit on my second enlistment. There were practically no advancements, so I was 3rd

Class over four years. Then in a competitive fleet examination I was very fortunate to be one of the very few who made 2nd Class. And miracle of miracles, when I had 9, 10 months in they had an examination for 1st Class and I was on the flag allowance of Commander Battleship Division Three at that time and they recommended that I be allowed to take the examination for 1st Class even though I didn't have my year in.

Q: Were you on the flagship?

A: Yes, When I reenlisted I was assigned to the flag allowance of Commander Battleship Division Three. Our flagship was the *Arizona*.

Q: What was life like on the *Arizona* in the mid 30's.

A: Well, let me go a little bit further. So in the next four years I was on the staff of Commander Battleship Division Three. We moved around. For two years basically we stayed on the *Arizona*. Temporarily we made trips on the *Tennessee*, a short trip on the *Nevada*. When we went to the East Coast in 1934 we transferred to the USS *Maryland*, which was not in our Division. We went around to the East Coast and the remodernized battleships, *Idaho*, *Mississippi*, and *New Mexico*, were coming out of the yard; the new Battleship Division Three. I served on all of them, and I served the last year of that tour aboard the *Idaho*.

Well, life on a battleship in those days was I suppose by modern day standards, I suppose it was the same as being in Paul Revere's Navy, but to us it was pretty good. What did a sailor expect? to eat three times a day, and find a place to sleep if you possibly could, which was not easy. The deck force on some of the battleships would have to swing hammocks. Being a yeoman, we had a flag office, or temporary office, and where you worked in the day you slept in the night. If you were fortunate you had a cot. If you didn't have a cot, you cleared the desk, you had your mattress, and you slept on the desk, or any..... we didn't sleep on the floor. And the ships in that respect were very crowded. Where it was living space the daytime, it was literally sleeping space at night. And the only battleship I was ever aboard that had bunks was the *Nevada*.

Q: What years were you on the *Arizona*?

A: I was on the *Arizona* from... I went aboard in May, 1932, stayed only a few weeks, went to the *Tennessee*, went up to Puget Sound and back. We came back to the *Arizona*. Except for a few trips, we stayed on the *Arizona* until the Spring of 1934, when the ship went into the Navy yard and the Fleet went to the East Coast.

Q: What sort of reputation did the *Arizona* as a ship have, in

the Fleet.

A: Well, I think the *Arizona* was a good ship and to me I didn't realize on my first four enlist..... I thought... we hadn't been eating so well, my first four years, but when you don't know it, it makes the world of difference. The food on the *Arizona* was excellent, and one reason being anchored in Southern California, fruit, and vegetables, and milk, and all those things were very very plentiful, and it was what you would call a "good feeder". But I would say the *Arizona* was a good ship. In fact, my experience on all the battleships I was on, the battleships were nice ships. They were clean, plenty of room, and at noon you could... in the sunshine.....you could lay down on the teakwood decks and they were clean. The ships were good.

Q: What was discipline like in the Navy at that time?

A: Very strict. Very strict. In other words, in the Depression days, if you were over leave just a few minutes, once or twice, you would be discharged. See in other words, there was just no money.

Q: When you were on the *Arizona*, on the flag allowance, who was the battleship division commander then?

A: The first Admiral we had was Admiral Crosley. He was a very splendid old gentleman, waiting to retire. He had a big beard, and very much a gentleman. The next one was Admiral Ridley McLean as I recall. He was a much different type of individual, very fussy, and actually he must have had a certain amount of influence because his health was so bad that he never should have come back to his sea command. And when we made a trip up to San Francisco on the USS *Nevada*, he died in San Francisco, and I had pictures, which are now in the Navy Museum, of the tremendous funeral party of all the Admirals in the Fleet coming over to pay their respects to Admiral Ridley McLean. The next Admiral we had was Admiral Murfin. He was... well later on in the Pearl Harbor investigations and what not; also a very splendid man; very much a gentleman. And I always remember him because as we had the farewell... when he said farewell, and was being detached, we lined up all the flag allowance and as I went past him he said, "Good bye Johnson." He called me by name. He knew who I was. See, I was a 3rd Class Yeoman, or 2nd Class at the time and somebody occasionally, when the Admiral writer was not there, I would have to take the bail into the Admiral, and a few times I had some rather unsuccessful attempts at taking shorthand, at which I wasn't very good at. Then the last Admiral we had was an Admiral Smith, By that time I was a Yeoman 1st Class, having made it in seven years, a miracle, and.... would you like that? That's an interesting thing?

I told you, when I went upper 1st Class I didn't have my year in. I took the examination on the *Tennessee*. I thought I'd done quite well on it, and the Sunday before they were to go over to the flagship, I found out from some of my spies in their executive office, that all the members of the board signed off on

my paper, except one JG who refused to sign, because I didn't have my full year in. So the next Sunday I got those papers. If I hadn't had contacts I couldn't have done this. I knew how the system worked. In other words, I was living within the system and I was going to beat the system. That's the way you survive. I got those papers from the Executive Officers office, strictly under the cuff. I went around to the Senior member of the Board, and he signed it. I went to the next member of the Board, he was the supply corps officer and he said, " You have some trouble?" Fine old gentleman, and he signed it. There was no way that the young JG was going to do it. The next day our flag secretary and our flag Lt. were both aboard. The flag secretary was Edmund Woolrich who later became a Vice Admiral, and the flag secretary was Harry Thurber, who later became a Rear Admiral; very hard man. He also had had kind of a hard night the night before, and I went up very respectfully, and I said to him, "Mr. Thurber, Lt. JG so and so won't sign my papers." Now.. we called him.... what did we call him... well, when he didn't know it the flag yeoman said, "Harry's a mean man." He buzzed the flag secretary, the flag Lt. (*Lt. Woolrich*) He said, "I want those papers signed." And I'm not quite sure what took place, but enough pressure was put on that Lt.(jg.), where he signed the papers with a note on the bottom, not eligible on such and such a date. Then I felt satisfied and vindicated. Then the papers went over to Commander Battleship Division Three, and the promotions came out and my name was not on it, which didn't bother me. Then again, I contacted one of my friends, a spy, on combat ship staff. See, the enlisted men also had contacts. If you had friends you had contacts below official circles. If you were smart enough to use them. He told me that the papers had been destroyed and I felt satisfied. In other words they had my chance. And we were on I believe the *Mississippi*, I believe at that time and I was in the flag office one Saturday afternoon and the guard mail came in, and I opened an envelope like this, and I could see something. The only thing I could see, it said, Yeoman 2nd to Yeoman 1st, but I couldn't read the name. I suppose I stared at that 30 seconds, which believe me, was two eternities. I finally screwed up the courage and the strength to gingerly pull that paper out, and it said Lloyd O. Johnson being promoted from Yeoman 2nd to Yeoman 1st. I jumped up in the air. I looked on the other papers; there were some other promotions there. I took those in my hand. I got permission from our staff officer to request a boat. I got a boat. I went to the *Tennessee*. I hand carried it to their office. I got them to endorse it and sign it and bring it back to our ship. And I went to the executive office where the ships yeoman were, and I said, "Promote us." I proudly sewed on my three stripes, one hash mark, seven years in the Navy, which was almost a miracle, because I think there was only one man on the ship. And when you walk down the street, with one hash mark and three stripes under your bird, nobody believed it could happen. That was in the Depression days.

From then on out; from '34 out, the rating structure became just a bit easier, but very difficult. Then I found out afterwards, again through the grapevine, what had happened. Our flag secretary, as I say, Lt. Woolrich, later Vice Admiral Woolrich, at the direction

of the flag secretary, had gone over to combat ships, and told the flag secretary over there, the Admiral wants the Yeoman and the Signalman rated. So they had put them in the safe, and secrecy. That was the only time that anything like that had ever been done.

Q: So when was your next promotion after that?

A: Next promotion...well, I played it smart. After making 1st Class I believe you had to have either two or three years sea duty before you were to be eligible for Chief. Now what would happen, quite a number of the boys would make 1st Class, immediately put in for shore duty, and then they would be marooned because they would have to come back to complete their shore duty and do more sea duty to get their time in to be eligible for Chief. I waited until I knew I would have my two or three years... three years I believe it was, at sea before I applied for sea duty, and I applied for shore duty. Again, I lived within the system, still beating the system.

Again, one of our Officers had gone back to Washington, and I had asked him to look into the possibilities of getting me recruiting duty in Salt Lake City. And when we down in Panama in 1936, I received a dispatch from him, from the Navy Department, addressed to me in care of Commander Battleship Division Three, stating there was no vacancy in Salt Lake City, but there was a vacancy in Denver, would I take it. And of course the answer is yes.

I then took the examination for Chief Petty Officer, passed it and by the time that the three years was up, I had taken the examination but they wouldn't promote me because I didn't have the three years in before the examination. And this is a side light, I felt very well satisfied about that until that time, until a couple of years later I saw a friend of mine who was a Chief Yeoman at that time. A year after I had made 1st Class, I had been responsible for him to make 1st Class, because we had one allotment for 1st Class which we couldn't use, and I was able to the Yeoman had quite a bit of power, if you knew what to do. I had been able to get our flag secretary to transfer that to his... where he was, so he got 1st Class. I found out that he had been attached to the White House Staff. He had shown moving pictures to President Roosevelt, and he had made Chief Yeoman in two years before I did. In the mean time though, it was academic because the second time I took the examination, I had gone to night school to improve my shorthand and typing, I received my Chief promotion in February of 1939. I already was on the list for acting pay clerk. On the 1st of April I was promoted to acting pay clerk.

Q: What year was that?

A: 1939. And I went to transfer to Norfolk and on the 1st of April I became a warrant pay clerk. I was number 13 on the list. They made 10 originally, so I was on the waiting list of three. Then in those days after you had been an acting pay clerk after one year, had to take an examination for your permanent warrant. And I did that successfully, I think in the summer of 1940....

maybe it was two years, I'm not sure. Well it was '40 or '41, and I'm quite sure that I was the last, or one of the last acting pay clerks that ever had to take the written examination for a permanent warrant because the War came along, and then it was relaxed.

Q: How would you describe the duties of a pay clerk in the Navy in those days?

A: The pay clerks in most... were broken down in two categories. On the USS *Whitney* there was the stores pay clerk who took care of all the general stores. In my particular case, and fortunate for me, I was a commissary and ships store pay clerk. In other words, I was responsible for the general mess and the ship store. But again on the *Whitney*, it was a much greater job than that, because we acted as the mother ship for the two squadrons of destroyers assigned to us, and we were accountable for their provisions, when their provision ship.... in other words, they would be invoiced to us and we had to reinvoice them to the destroyers. In the mean time, we had large refrigerated space and store room space, under normal conditions, when the destroyers were alongside, we provisioned them. So my case was unique in that I had much more to do than I would have had to do if I had been let us say on a normal ship... much greater responsibility.

Q: Where was the Whitney when you joined her?

A: Another good story. I was temporarily assigned to the pay office. When they found out I was going to be promoted, I was transferred to the recruiting station to Norfolk where I was sworn in. You couldn't become a pay clerk unless there was a commissioned Supply Corps Officer there. The *Whitney* came to Norfolk, it went up to Newport, was supposed to come back and pick my up. It came in, I met my new boss, and I want to get that in here because Lt. Comm. Charles Schoff, Supply Corps USN, the most wonderful man I've ever met.

Q: Do you recall how to spell his last name?

A: S-C-H-A-A-F, Charles. And the ship departed for ... their ship departed for Newport and I was in the process going in debt maybe 4 or \$500.00 to have all my new uniforms made. About three days after I put in the order, one night at something like 6:00, I got telephone orders, "You have to be detached in the morning and join the *Whitney*, in Newport."

Q: Hold on just a second. (changing side of tape)

A: I had the following things to do: I had to get out to the Naval Base, and I had \$300 in my safe and turn it over to the old Chief Pay Clerk. He'd had one or two drinks after he came home and he didn't want to come out to the ... he didn't want to bothered coming out there or not. I convinced him he should. I had to go down to Frank Thomas's Clothing Store, the uniform

shop, just before they closed and get my uniforms out. I had to get packed. I had to get up the next morning and catch the ferry for across the Bay and head for Newport and be there the following day. So about 8:30, I left my 21 year old wife and baby on the dock, and as I'm on the dock waving, she's 21 years old, away from home, crying. And that was her first experience being married to a Navy man.

I traveled all night by bus. The next morning we got into Newport and as we drove through Newport, they'd had that terrible hurricane up there; a lot of damage. I got aboard... the boat was waiting for me. I got aboard the ship. I met the man I was going to relieve. He had been a Chief Pay Clerk on the *Arizona*, Rudy Summers. I had to sign a few papers. He proudly withdrawn at 1:00. As soon as he got off the ship, the ship headed for Panama. In fact they were waiting for me there. Then we went to Panama of course, and up to San Diego. In the mean time my wife had got the car shipped by boat, got transportation, and when we got to San Diego, she was waiting for me.

Q: And when did you get to Hawaii?

A: We stayed in San Diego the December of '39. In April, we

went up to the Navy yard in Mare Island. We came back to San Diego and I think we got to Hawaii latter May or about the first of June, of '40. We anchored... strange thing... then we anchored next two years or so, in what I call the "mud flats" right below the Aiea sugar cane mill.

Q: Did the *Whitney* spend most of her time anchored there or did she go out to sea?

A: Very, very seldom... during the two years we were there, in the Fall of 1940, we made a short trip back to San Diego and back and the following year about the same time, we went back to San Diego and returned once more. And on that occasion my wife said, "I'm coming out to join you." So sometime around in October, she went to the bank, she drew out the last... we only had \$150, she drew that out and bought a ticket for her and the boy on the [SS] *Lurline* out to Hawaii. And by that time fortunately, I had found her a place to live, very difficult. It was on Sutter St. in Kaimuki. And the only other times I remember going out, this must have been in '40, we made a recreational cruise, not so much for the *Whitney* but for other people to the Islands... one day trips to the Islands of Maui, and the big Island of Hawaii. Again, one of my interesting experiences where being Junior, I got stuck with something which wasn't my business. I got this nice little piece of paper from the Executive Officer, appointing me to facilitate the loading and off-loading of the passenger, officers cars. Now that should have been the Chief Boatswain and the Boatswain Mate, but he had done a little politiking, because he was afraid he might damage it, but in my case, again there was a certain amount of luck. When I had been on the *Henderson*, while I had never been responsible, I had seen cars moved back and forth many times by the Boatswain's Mate, so we didn't have

any trouble at all. We off-loaded the cars along with the Boatswain's Mate... good men. Unloaded them at Maui, brought them back that night, off-loaded them at Hilo, back that night, unloaded them back off in Honolulu, not a scratch.

Then... now here's an interesting thing, sometime in '41, as times were getting worse, our ship and I suppose others, we went off to shoot the guns for target practice. I don't think the guns had been shot for ten years. And on the *Whitney* as I recall, we had four 5-inch 50 main battery, and for anti-aircraft guns we had the 3-inch 50's. And I remember it very well, because I was check sighting on the rear after-gun. So we fired our batteries out there in target practice, and as a result we couldn't fire the 5-inch, but when the 7th of December came along, our anti-aircraft crews knew how to fire the 5-inch 50's, and while I wasn't involved, we also had the .50 caliber machine guns. And I was talking to Al Piccard, they apparently fired them too. At least our crew had had some experience in firing.

Now also, it's kind of interesting, we mentioned the guns. Again, when I came aboard the ship, you get a battle station. They put me in ammunition supply. I'm not sure that's the place where a pay clerk, or an acting pay clerk would normally have the battle station. But I almost suspected, again, being Junior, I was given something that nobody else wanted.

Q: Well, as war approached, were you given other collateral duties aside from your regular duties as a pay clerk?

A: That's a yes and no thing because on the ships the supply department normally makes up the coding board.

Q: What's a coding board?

A: The coding board is that group of officers who are qualified to learn and can code and decode classified messages.

Q: How did the coding board work?

A: A coding board would consist basically of the Communication Officer. The Senior Officer was normally the Senior Coding Officer which on the *Whitney* was my boss, Lt. Comm. Shauf, and the other pay clerk, Chief Pay Clerk Forrest Brown of San Diego, the Dispersing Officer at that time was Ensign Wally Milleson, later Captain Milleson.

Q: Do you know how to spell Milleson's last name?

A: M-I-L-L-I-S-O-N.

Q: And what about Brown, does that have an E or not?

A: No.

Q: No E.

A: Forrest Brown. Now, I don't think this is classified any

more. I don't remember all the system, but they have strip systems of coding, where you move strips back and forth and line up letters. And then of course the other thing is the ECM, I think that's unclassified now. An ECM machine is a typewriter keyboard, looks like a typewriter, and again I don't even remember for sure, but basically its a system of wheels with numbers and letters on them (I don't know how many rows.) And in some preordained order, on every single day, for a given code, you have to put these wheels and all these other things you put in there in a certain. And when you type, whether you're coding or encoding, the machine types out in most cases a combination of 5 letters or 5 numbers, or combinations of both.

Q: Do you recall what sort of messages were coming in from high commands to the Whitney as was began to approach?

A: Again, as things... first thing is, on the ship's level I don't think I ever coded or decoded anything. In the late Fall sometime, of 1941, the staff of Commanders Destroyers Pacific Fleet came aboard temporarily (the Admiral is Captain Theowald) and then I was pressed into duty on the coding board, COMDESPAC coding board. Now there codes were on higher level, which the ship was not authorized to break, although we had the wheels. And I cannot remember any of the other codes or classifications except one thing which will always stick in my mind, historically, which is apparently unrecorded in everything I've read. And sometime very late in November, I'd a week or ten days before Pearl Harbor, when I was on watch, a dispatch came in and I have refreshed my memory having read the one, "*At Dawn We Slept*" and I'm sure they're identical. The first thing it said, "This is a war warning message."

Q: Was that a message addressed to COMDESPAC?

A: No it was not, as far as I remember. Again, I think the message (I haven't really got a sense), I think it was the action addressee was Commander Asiatic Fleet, and I'm quite sure that CINCPAC was an info addressee. And I would guess (I know the communication system) I think it probably went priority to Commander Asiatic Fleet. Into CINCPAC Fleet, I'm going to surmise, without checking, that it probably came in deferred.

Now I never thought anything about it at the time. We processed it. I never saw anything change. And if my memory is correct, and I'm sure that it is, that message, or a version of it, was transmitted through that same channel system at least twice in the next two or three days that I'm aware of. Because the only time that I would see the classified messages, is when I was on watch, because the COMDESPAC communicator would periodically take those messages out of the coding room and you never saw them again.

Now what bothers me about that particular message, after I read "*At Dawn We Slept*", "*Day of Infamy*", "*American Magic*", and probably two or three more, it tells about the very restricted distribution of that "War warning message" even to the Chief of Staff, one of the big staffs not seeing it. Now there is a

discrepancy there because we broke that on the COMDESPAC, which is the Type Commander code level. If we broke it, every other Type Commander out in the Pacific Ocean would have broken that, unless we were making an authorized ... an authorized decoding of a message which should have been addressed to us. But I believe if we had the coding ability to break it, it was something that any type commander should see. And another thing is when a message is decoded, it doesn't go from the coding room to the Admiral. A classified message goes to the communicator, probably goes to the communicator who (I don't know whether it's paraphrased before the Command sees it or afterward) but a classified message is paraphrased in such a way that if you took the message and the code you couldn't put them together. Normally on our...

Q: Is that for security reasons?

A: Oh yes, that's a requirement. In fact, I don't even believe President Roosevelt got the original copies in the White House. Now, on our staff, the smaller staff in COMDESPAC, the dispatch would at least have gone from the Coding Officer to the Communication Officer, possibly the Flag Lt., and certainly the Flag Secretary, before the Admiral ever saw it. On a larger staff like COMDESPAC or CINCPAC, it probably passed two or three hands. It probably went to the Chief of Staff, but I can't believe that anything got to the Admiral right away. So in all the investigations I read, either nobody comes forth and says it or in other words, it seems to me that the distribution of that message is shown as much more limited in reality than it must have been, even though nobody wants to remember it or admit it. Now the reason I say that, I was a communication yeoman in '32 on the Tennessee. I spent four years on COMDESPAC. I was the Admiral's writer for a year, where I took the Admiral's mail in to him. And of the only three people on the staff that had free access to the Admiral's cabin was the Admiral's steward, the Admiral's writer, and the flag secretary. Nobody else could walk unannounced into the Admiral's cabin.

Q: In 1941, as War approached, and you were getting these messages in, what other sorts of activity were there in the Fleet? In other words, did the tempo of activity pick up?

A: Oh yes. It seemed to be a gradual thing. For instance... well, now one of the things we were aware, we were very much aware, and I had a good pipeline because my boss, Capt. Schoff had the pipeline let us say, to higher information, was a personal friend of mine besides being my boss, and he was to keep my in. And he also had been in Washington, where he knew how the political system worked. He also had second hand information about President Roosevelt and an attitude he had if he ever got mad at a person. In other words, I don't remember the exact details but he was apparently, quoting this, a man who never forgave. In other words, if someone crossed him, that was the end, let us say, of that particular person in that position or even a career.

Q: What sort of things were happening on the *Whitney* and the destroyer she serviced?

A: The first thing we started to notice, let us say probably in late '41... late '40 or '41, we started getting Reserve Officers aboard.

Q: How did they fit in with the regular officers?

A: Well now, the ones that we got aboard our ship fit in, I would say, very well. I don't remember all of them but I'll try to. One of them was a dentist for instance. He was so happy to come aboard the Navy and live the good life, when he didn't have to worry about all the ladies complaining about their missed appointments. Another one that came in, if my memory serves me right was a Lt. Ashley. I don't remember much about him. Another one, I didn't know him personally.... well I knew him but... and another one who came was Ensign VonWine. Somebody asked me about him the other day. I remember him because he was about 6'7". The ones that came to our ship fit in very well, and we possibly had a doctor, and there may have been one or two more, but I think in the initial stages, we got about 5 in '41 by the time the Japs came.

Q: And what about the enlisted ranks?

A: I seriously doubt that we got Reserves at that time on the *Whitney*. See the *Whitney* was somewhat of a specialized ship because we had the repair shops. And the people who worked in the repair shops in the repair division were highly qualified machinists, carpenters, and so forth. And the ships company on a ship like that remained relatively stable. They got some real good men. Although we acted as a receiving ship where people would come temporarily to and from destroyers, but very few of those people ever stayed. In other words, the *Whitney* sailor, if he got on there, and he made it, and nobody got mad at him, he'd become what we call a "plankie" or a "plankor". You own a little spot, and you found some space on there, where there was just enough room for you to sleep at night, and nobody else dared to sleep there.

Q: On the weekend of the Attack, how did you spend Saturday, the day before the Attack?

A: On the coding board.

Q: And what about Saturday night?

A: I was scheduled to take the weekend watch, but about 6:00 at night, Chief Pay Clerk Forrest Brown said, "Your wife is here. Why don't you go home? I'll take your watch." And of course, I was happy to take that. And by strange token the USS *Casson* had just came in on a cruise from Australia, and by brother-in-law, Bruce Harrison was aboard that ship, and I had been responsible

for getting him into the Navy, when I was on recruiting duty in Denver. So when I got home, my wife tells me. As I got off the bus, they were just going to the movie, and my brother-in-law spotted me and said, "That's Johnny!" They called me Johnny in those days. So we went home. I had quite a talk with him and I remember he told us that night, he said, "If we don't quit practicing shooting these guns. These guns are going to be worn out before we ever get a chance to shoot at the Japs. We then planned a trip to windward Oahu and went to bed that night.

Q: What time did you get up that morning?

A: The next morning, believe it or not, we were in bed around 8:00 and my brother-in-law came to me and said, aghast... his face was aghast. He said, "The radio says, the Japs are attacking Pearl Harbor!" I said, "You're crazy! That's one of those silly drills." All we have is drills. Heard a few announcements. My little boy went and turned the radio off, but the radio down below me was blasting out, "The Japs are attacking Pearl Harbor!" So we got on our clothes, dressed, got in our old 1937 car, went down Center Street, and headed out Beretania [*Street*] to the [*Pearl Harbor*] Navy Yard.

Q: What was the trip out to the Navy yard like? How long did it take?

A: Well, I've estimated that and I just don't know. The distance is approximately 12 miles. I suppose under normal conditions, it should have taken me half an hour. If I left home... my wife tells me we were dressed in 10 minutes... I must have left home no later than 8:20. Again, as I recall, although my mind is kind of blank, it seems to me that our trip was relatively fast. In other words, we had some hold ups, but not very many, and again...

Q: What sort of hold ups?

A: Well, there were police and what not... a traffic jam. I don't recall we had any serious hold ups... some delays. And again, it's impossible for me to give the exact time. But the only thing I can specifically remember as we were approaching Hickam Field toward the Navy yard, you could see the smoke, and I say a number of planes that were in the process... I'm sure they were dive bombing Battleship Row. Now that would have been the second attack, and there must be a time on that. Then very shortly thereafter, as we were getting a little closer to the Navy yard gate, looking down the road toward Aiea, there was a very large plane flying less than probably a hundred feet off the ground in the direction... it would have been the northern direction and it was flying so low, I said, "That is going to crash!" And since then I've been told that one Val bomber did crash out in the cane fields. Another thing, they tell me, forty years later, that the road between Hickam Field and the Navy yard was littered with cars in the ditch and what not, where many people had been killed by strafing. But I have no memory of

that. That they had told me.

I got in at the Navy yard, no delay. I let my brother-in-law off at the enlisted mens landing at [Merry] Point. I drove down and parked the car by the Officer's landing, went to the dock; there were probably half a dozen officers there. All Battleship Row was burning. You could see the whole thing, and there was a Japanese aerial torpedo beached about... a distance of maybe 30 feet. I've been told afterwards...

Q: 30 feet?

A: 30 feet from where I stood. I've been told afterwards, that that had been fired at a ship that tied up to the lumber dock and missed. Another survivor told me. I can't verify. The torpedo I thought was remarkably small. I would estimate it to be eight or nine feet long, and ten to twelve inches in diameter at the most. It was a small torpedo. We stood... now I'm going to estimate that we stood at the dock and watched things burn, it couldn't have been over 10 or 15 minutes. It might not have been that long. The what I call a "pool boat" came along, an officers boat, and everybody got in it. And the coxswain, as we departed, headed over Battleship Row and he almost got... we were almost over where the oil was burning. He went that close. We then went through the area where the Phoenix had laid, over off the sub base, and the whole area there was covered with floating case... the brass cases that the Phoenix had fired. It must have been hundreds of them.

They then let us off and we got to the Whitney. Now again, at the time, it's my impression that I got to the Whitney not later than 9:45. Now during that time I never saw a plane. There's was no planes over Battleship Row. We didn't see any. Although afterwards I'm told that my brother-in-law was strafed, the area on the enlisted mens landing was strafed. I don't know by how many planes. We never saw that and we never heard it. I got aboard the ship, changed my clothes as fast as I could, went down to my battle station in ammunition supply. About 10:00... roughly 10, our anti-aircraft guns fired a few times at some plane flying over. Somebody said they were American planes, but reading the Naval Institute proceedings afterwards, I'm told it was a Jap reconnaissance plane. It was taking photos of the area, and I understand some of them were even later. When I got back aboard the ship I was very well pleased, like I told you earlier, I had been in charge of ammunition supply for two years. The men who were in the working party were off in the repair force. But we would have General Quarters, we would have General Quarters, the magazines were right outside my office where I stood. It was necessary for the boys to go down, open the hatches, go down two decks, and they would bring out two of these dummy 5-inch shells and the powders, and they lug this mass all the way back to the end of the ship. And the anti-aircraft crews would have to get out two or three dummy anti-aircraft projectiles all the way up toward the top around the Captains cabin where the thing were. General Quarters would be secured and these boys would be dragging this dummy ammunition back and forth, and I suppose they must have spent two years swearing at

me for having made them do all these things.

But when the attack came, a gunners mate by the name of Webb went up to Captain's cabin, broke in, got the keys to the ammunition locker, came down and unlocked it. He got down into those magazines, they got the anti-aircraft projectiles up there, and in something less than ten minutes they were firing the anti-aircraft guns. The one on starboard fired the most. And along with the other ships, it's my impression they also got the .50-caliber machine guns going and Al Piccard tells me that he kicked in the door to the Captain's cabin, and hooked up the water hose to the .50-caliber machine gun. So along with the .50-caliber machine guns on the *Whitney*, the destroyers alongside, some of the 5-inch batteries on the destroyers, or 3-inch, they either shot down or diverted the attacking the Japanese fighters basically coming from the direction of Battleship Row and Ford Island, where they, let us say, run them between us and the *Dobbin* and Ford Island, and a number of them crashed over in the vicinity of the *Medusa*. And I've always felt that my ammunition handling detail probably contributed toward saving the *Whitney* and her destroyers by then. I fully appreciated all those tiring drills that we had gone through in a job that I didn't think was mine. And in San Antonio be strange chance we had a *Whitney* meeting and I found about 7 or 8 of these boys had been in my ammunition supply parties and I was able to thank them and let them know that I was the man who was responsible for making them carry that damn dummy ammunition back and forth for two years when they didn't want to.

Q: Well, thank you very much. I really appreciate you taking the time to come up here and help us out.

A: Good.

Q: It's been a major contribution.